

Islam and Edward Said: An Overview

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Abstract: This article offers an objective reading of Edward Said's legacy with various literary approaches to appreciate the evaluation and justification to his elucidations towards the West's entire understanding and representation of Islam and the Muslim world. It also assesses his putative efforts to defend Islam as a culture against the monstrous representations of the Western world through the constructed views of Western media, scholars, politicians and general people. These attempts are based on his profound insights as a scholar, integrity and commitment, and innovative interpretation. It tries to contextualize the present international political situation regarding Islam with Said's profound thoughts and innovative interpretation, and will render a revisionist eye towards the misconception of many westerners against Islam.

For more than three decades, scholars have been intrigued by the writings of the Palestinian-American scholar, Edward Said as a putative defender of Islamic civilization from misconceptions and malignity of the West. Author of twenty different books and hundreds of essays, Said, before 9/11, placed himself as an Arab intellectual in the West and discovered in Europe and later in the United States the "fictionalized Islam" which was the product of crisis and conflict between Muslims and the West, and there is hardly any calm, mutual exchange. This misconception about Islam from the West got a dramatic dimension at the beginning of the final decade of the twentieth century with the fall of the Soviet Union through the end of the Cold War. In (1990) an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled *The Roots of Muslim Rage* the veteran theorist and historian

Bernard Lewis recklessly affirmed the personification of two enormous conflicting entities called “West” and “Islam”. Then Samuel Huntington, a Professor of political science at Harvard, took Lewis’s phrase “The Clash of Civilizations” and wrote another article having the phrase as the title in the summer 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs* which aggravated the idea of Lewis placing the East and West in dualistic conflict. But after 9/11 this visionary and belligerent kind of thought is being intensified exponentially from various nook and corner of the Western world. As a result the past decade has seen a considerable increase in scientific, journalistic and literary publications about Islam and the Muslim world with apocalyptic warnings without any substantial evidence to back up their concern. In this regard, references can be made to the publishing of Bernard Lewis’s book, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (2002), Cheryl Benard’s *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners Resources and Strategies* published by the RAND Corporation in 2003. In those books Islam is depicted as backward, anti-modern and monolithic in comparison with the Western world, producing instability and terrorism all over the world. Even non-western but prominent writers in the West such as Salman Rushdie and Fuad Ajami who had criticized Huntington’s work before 9/11, adopted his paradigm after 9/11 (as cited in Earn, 2004, p. 47). Accordingly, after 9/11 Edward Said was blamed for not advocating Muslims as terrorists and subsequently became subject to a web of racism, cultural stereotyping and dehumanizing ideology and was also labeled as the “Professor of Terror” by the rightwing Jewish neoconservative publication ‘Commentary’ (as cited in Ahmed, 2003, p.1). As Teitelbaum and Litvak (2006) think “His discursive blinders-for he (Said) has created his own discourse-led him before September 11, 2001 to denigrate the idea that Islamist terrorists could blow up buildings and sabotage airplanes” (p.1). Even in 1985 he was called a Nazi by the Jewish Defence League and his university office was set on fire. In addition, Said’s writings are sometimes reduced to a simple pro-Islamic polemic or dismissed as the work of an angry Palestinian postcolonial writing back or caricatured as fundamentalist texts or termed as methodologically and theoretically inconsistent discourse and intelligent suppression of historical facts. Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, as befits a man of wide interests and engagements, Said and his critique have enjoyed an authority in the postcolonial studies and is still revered as the crucial driving force towards the development of “Post-Colonial Theory” as Said himself later admitted that *Orientalism* (1978) outgrew its limited scope and has been read as well as used in many ways he had never imagined. In other words, his methodological, epistemological and historical critiques were received by a number of disciplines, ranging from feminism and gender studies to International Relations (IR), anthropology, comparative literature and cultural studies in the postcolonial era. He is considered a paramount scholar and an important figure in postcolonial studies. But our concern is to evaluate his seminal contributions by making Said’s legacy free from the confining “tether of a polemical relationship” to either colonialism or Islam or nationalism and judging its relationship to Islam as a culture from a logical and critical point of view, and to remove the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that imprison some scholars about Said’s stance regarding Islam. By any objective measure, we can see, the corpus of his works regarding Islam is a turning point in the history of Western literary criticism and landmark in the history of ideas of the western world about Muslims; his works are inculcated with the

tendency to study constructs and institutions from a polyphonic point of view, with the premise that culture and politics, power and the arts are intimately linked. So the themes of his works remain relevant to the present modern world. As a result it gives us a new lens through which we can easily understand Muslim culture and its relationship to the West. That is why he is called a cultural theorist, political activist and distinctive intellectual. So focusing on Said's erudite and profound insights, integrity and unwavering commitment and innovative interpretation we argue that he is totally secular in the sense of being focused on the real world and the contradictions of the 'liberal' West.

Erudite insights:

Edward Said's profound insight comes from his far-sightedness. In an high-ranking article published in *The World, the Text and the Critic* Said pushed forward the idea termed as "traveling theory", perception and theories travel from person to person, from situation to situation, and from a particular context to another. The function of an organic intellectual, according to Said, is to comprehend the conditions that gave birth to various ideas, identify its limitations, and then creatively accommodate and transplant such ideas to a new time and place. In other words, ideas and theories must travel from their points of origin and undergo a process of transformation when applied to new circumstances. Edward Said(2003) in *Preface to Orientalism* said :

There's been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find, like Easter eggs in the living-room. The breathtaking insouciance of jejune publicists who speak in the name of foreign policy and who have no knowledge at all of the language real people speak has fabricated an arid landscape ready for American power to construct there an ersatz model of free market "democracy"(p. 2).

Edward Said's searing indictment of US "ersatz model of free market democracy" designed by USA in the context of the first Gulf War would be certainly even more resonant in the contemporary context preceding and following the Arab Spring, a revolutionary surge of demonstrations, protests, and wars occurring in the Arab world that began on 18 December 2010. As a result the rulers of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen have been forced from power causing heavy casualties and blood shedding ; civil uprisings have erupted in Bahrain and Syria. In the same way George W. Bush and his cohorts employed the same logic in Afghanistan and Iraq sacrificing many more innocent civilians. It is crystal clear to the world that this Arab Springs never emanated from within the Arab countries rather it was instigated and manipulated by the western countries on the basis of the "neo-con philosophy" designed by Michael Ledeen (2012) who not only justifies punishing "crappy little countries" like Iraq but also confirms that American foreign policy hinges on "creative destruction" and "total war". According to the neo-con guru, America will be invading more "crappy little countries" in the future in

the name of “war on terror” and needs to invade in “every ten years or so”. So whenever in modern times there has been an acutely political tension felt between Islam and West, the West takes the path of pseudo-objective, pre-planned and cool action rather than direct violence. The Arab Spring is a glaring example of it. Can any sane person say that Egyptians and Libyans are leading more peaceful life through so-called democracy after Arab Spring? Frankly speaking, the focal purpose of USA is to establish strategic control and economic hegemony in the Muslim countries through USA’s obedient democratic governments because the Western powers especially USA considers the Islamic Orient important for its resources or its geopolitical location. This view gets support from that of Karl Marx when he articulated that the British introduced railways, printing presses and the telegraph in colonial India, not out of their compassion of their hearts but were stimulated by their commercial interests (as cited in Rashid, 2003, p. 2). So we are today in the throes of a battle for domination by a superpower that insists on seeing the Muslims and Islam through Orientalization, while itself being nothing less than a reflection of all that it finds offensive about this fantastical Islam. Accordingly, USA might consider the Arab Spring as a part of the ongoing battle of the ‘Civilized world’ against the uncivilized and this conception certainly belongs to Orientalism which started with the invasion of Napoleon in Egypt in 1798 and is still prevalent in different shapes in various perspectives. So while circumstances have changed measurably, Orientalism is traveling across time. Thirty five years and myriad editions later, *Orientalism* (1978) and Said’s critiques continue to travel precisely because the conditions of its production remain unchanged.

Edward Said’s insights derived from his witty, ingenious and penetrating mind which equipped the Palestinians with elegant and priceless intellectual guides to be free from the grasp of Israel. It is known even to many Israelis that all of Israel was once Palestine as told in Said’s (2000) article “America’s Last Taboo” that “Moshe Dayan said openly in 1976—every Israeli town or village once had an Arab name” (p.48). Since 1948 we have been observing the violence and ugly shedding of human blood, Israel as a occupying power since 1967, the outbreak of the second *Intifada*, awful suffering of the Palestinians in the reinvaded West Bank and Gaza but there is no way-out for the Palestinians. According to Said, even in 1978 the Camp David Agreement and in 1993 the Oslo Accord as ‘peace process’ failed due to the negligence of the Zionist organizations in American politics such as American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). Said was found completely right because American Zionist discourse is so strong that everything in the US politics is decided keeping a careful eye on the interest of Israel. Even recently Barack Obama, US president, named Chuck Hagel, a Republican senator, to lead the Pentagon. Despite that, all the Republican senators signaled they would make it tough for Hagel because “Hagel is too hard on Israel, too soft on Iran and the policy irks pro-Israeli camps” (“Obama’s Pentagon pick draws fire” 2013). Even Mr. Obama in his first official visit to Israel on 20th March 2013 says “I am confident in declaring that alliance (between US and Israel) is eternal, is for ever” (“Obama vows undying US support to Israel” 2013). That is why Said (2000) in his

essay "America's Last Taboo" said "American Zionism has made any serious public discussion of the past or future of Israel-by far the largest recipient ever of US foreign aid-a taboo. To call this quite literally the last taboo in American life would not be an exaggeration"(p.47).In addition, recently in a historic session of the United Nations in New York , exactly 65 years after passing the Partition Plan for Palestine, the General Assembly voted by 138 countries to elevate from "non-member observer entity" to "non-member observer state," but USA voted against Palestine and the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton considered the resolution "unfortunate and counterproductive," explaining that

only through direct negotiations between the parties can the Palestinians and Israelis achieve the peace that both deserve: two states for two people, with a sovereign, viable, independent Palestine living side by side in peace and security with a Jewish and democratic Israel (as cited in Pugen,2012).

Through this statement by Hillary in 2012 we can easily prove the authenticity of Edward Said's(2000) statement in his essay *America's Last Taboo* "Here the consensus that Israeli is a model democracy, forming the one oasis of Western modernity in the political desert of the Middle East, is virtually impregnable" (p.50). On the other hand, "for all too many American Zionists, Palestinians are not real beings but demonized fantasies-fearsome embodiments of terrorism and anti-Semitism" (p.48).But as an organic intellectual, Said was not only morally indignant, angry to the systematic continuity of Israel's 65 year old oppression and maltreatment of the Palestinians but also spokesman for the road map of solution to the Palestinian question. He (2000) said in his essay *America's Last Taboo*

All peace arrangements undertaken in the illusion of an 'alliance' with the US can only confirm Zionist power. To submit supinely to American designs in the Middle East, as Arabs have done for almost a generation now, will bring neither peace and justice at home, nor equality abroad. Since 1980s I have tried to impress on the PLO leadership and every Palestinian or Arab I have met, that the quest for a protector in the White House is a complete chimera, since all recent presidents have been devoted to Zionist aims, and that the only way to change US policy is through a mass campaign on behalf of Palestinian human rights, outflanking the Zionist establishment and going straight to the American people. Uninformed and yet open to appeals for justice as they are, Americans are capable of reacting as they did to the ANC campaign against apartheid which finally changed the balances of forces inside South Africa(p.52).

Edward Said's insights originate from his power of psychological analysis of the people around him. In 1983 Said's *Covering Islam* was not written to inform us about what Islam is but to help us see how in many ways "Islam" stands as a concept which functions to maintain western cultural and political hegemony. Accordingly the American media is at war with Islam and this war has been going on. According to Said, while reporting about the Islamic world, the journalists of the American media unlike Chomsky, Rodinson, I.F.Stone are either not conscious about their own ideological biases

or matching with what Said calls ‘the consensus’ or they deny that they have such biases in the first place. At this stage, in a sophisticated way we can compare the unconscious ideological biases of the western journalists to the old Marxist themes ‘false consciousness’, essentially a result of ideological control imposed by capitalist society over the proletariat which the proletariat either do not know of or disregard with a view to their own probability of upward mobility. Just as ‘false consciousness’ of the proletariat systematically conceal or obscure the realities of the social relation of subordination, exploitation and domination between two classes in the mental setup of the proletariat, the unconscious ideological biases make the journalist move around the consensus or the common centre, Islam. Said (2007) in *Covering Islam* says

All of this converges around a common centre or consensus which all the media organizations almost certainly feel themselves to be clarifying, crystallizing, and forming. This is the point. The media can do all sorts of things, represent all sorts of point of view, provide many things that are eccentric, unexpectedly original, even aberrant. But in the end, because they are corporations serving and promoting a corporate identity-‘America’ and even the “West”-they all have the same central consensus in mind---This-----shapes the news, decides what is news and how it is news(p.52).

A French satirical magazine has recently published some cartoons of the Prophet of Islam on the excuse of the liberal formulation of media and its freedom of speech. But they must know, depictions of the Prophet are strictly prohibited and considered blasphemous by Muslims. It inflamed the Muslims who have already rioted over a movie, *Innocence of Muslims*, (2012) an anti-Islamic video produced by Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, mocking the Prophet .In 2011 the offices of “Charlie Hebdo”, a magazine, were bombed after it published an Arab Spring edition with the Prophet as “guest editor” on the cover. In the same way, in 2005 cartoons of Prophet were published in Denmark on the same lame excuse of freedom of speech and media. Strategically speaking, these incidents are not isolated but are rather interrelated. That means, according to Said, the media gravitates to the consensus, Islam, as exceptionality either without consciousness or with disregarding consciousness. Here we find similarity between this idea of “consensus” by Said and the idea of “logocentrism” by Jacques Derrida. Just as the whole of ‘Western philosophy’ rotates around Derrida’ logocentrism or centre and this centre limits the free play of thought forcing it to base on a belief in some ultimate ‘word’, presence, essence, truth or reality which will act as the foundation for all our thought, language and experience, so in Said’s case, the American media revolves around the ‘consensus’, Islam and this consensus “sets limits and maintains pressures” on the American media. But, Said argues consensus does its works beneath the surface instead of being a part of conspiracy, dictatorship and deterministic laws. It is a part of culture in the media. In this sense Said’s culture or consensus is like Foucault’s ‘epistemes’, ‘historical a priori’ within which every member of a culture, who is also fixed in a particular historical epoch, works and thinks.

Edward Said's deep insights are the result of the centrality of his role as a professional critic with reflective understanding based on rationality and a "historical sense". Most of the Muslim countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Libya have been suffering from dictatorship, military coups, insurgency, civil war, religious fundamentalism etc. For this, the Orientalists have been blaming Islam for making those countries fail and go to the dogs. But Said is completely free from this trammled vision and dilettante attitude. He (2003) says in *Preface to Orientalism*:

Arabs and Muslims have been told that victimology and dwelling on the depredations of empire is only way of evading responsibility in the present. You have failed, you have gone wrong, says the modern Orientalist. This of course is also V.S.Naipaul's contribution to literature that the victims of empire wail on while their country goes to the dogs. But what a shallow calculation of the imperial intrusion that is, how little it wishes to face the long succession of years through which empire continues to work its way in the lives, say, of Palestinians or Congolese or Algerians or Iraqis. Think of the line that starts with Napoleon, continues with the rise of Oriental Studies and the takeover of North Africa, and goes on in similar undertakings in Vietnam, in Egypt, in Palestine and during the entire 20th century in the struggle over oil and strategic control in the Gulf, in Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Afghanistan. Then think of the rise of anti-colonial nationalism, through the short period of liberal independence, the era of military coups, of insurgency, civil war, religious fanaticism, irrational struggle and uncompromising brutality against the latest bunch of 'native'(p.3).

The restlessness in the Muslim countries is not an isolated event rather the same scene is found in most third world countries in the post-colonial era. Undoubtedly this is the result of the psychological trauma the once colonized people suffered in colonial period. During colonial age the colonialists multiplied divisions, opposing groups, injected racial prejudices among the colonized people in order to bring about and intensify the stratification of the colonized societies. After the colonial age, the colonized societies could not achieve the long cherished harmony yet. Consequently the attacks and counter attacks from various social groups are rampant in those countries in the guise of nationalism, military coups, religious fanaticism, civil war etc. Think of the condition in the African countries which are the victims of this psychological trauma born of colonial history or oppression. While describing the causes of the troubled situation in Africa Jean Paul Sartre(2001) wrote in the *Preface to Frantz Fanon's "Wretched of the Earth"*;

They are cornered between our guns pointed at them (African) and those terrifying compulsions, those desires for murder which spring from the depth of their spirits and which they don't always recognize: for at first it is not their violence, it is ours (colonialists), which turns back on itself and rends them; and the first action of these oppressed creatures is to bury deep down that hidden anger which their and our moralities condemn and which is however the last refuge of their humanity.[-- --] If this suppressed fury fails to find an outlet, it turns in a vacuum and devastates the oppressed creatures themselves. In order to free themselves they even massacre each other. The different tribes fight between themselves since they cannot face the real enemy (p.8).

Apart from this, after the colonial era, neurosis and cultural depression became evident among the colonized societies and, this environment is very an ideal den in which religious teachings and knowledge easily prosper. V.S.Naipaul also shows us in his famous book *Beyond Belief* (1997) that cultural depression causes religious teaching and knowledge to flourish in Indonesia (34). As a result the people in the third world country became obsessed with things like possession of spirits and make use of it as a weapon against humiliation and despair. They could neither reject the culture of the colonialists nor adapt to it totally. And this dilemmatic position made them lag behind day by day. So it is very illogical to blame only Muslims and Islam for the backwardness of the Muslim dominated countries rather it is a common phenomena with the once colonized countries.

Integrity and unwavering commitment:

Edward Said's integrity and unfailing moral commitment comes from his feelings of compassion and justice to the sufferings of the general human beings within a context which is situated in history, culture and socio-economic reality. His supports of the Palestinian's sufferings never stopped him from criticizing the resistance's victimization of innocent Israeli civilians by way of persecution and genocide. A Christian by birth, he was a good student of Jewish history and spoke on regular basis simultaneously about historical Jewish suffering and contemporary Palestinian suffering. Dr Hannan.Ashrawi, a Palestinian legislator, aptly remarked in a moving tribute to her friend, Edward Said:

He had a gentle identification with the oppressed and an intimidating rage against the oppressor, a warm embrace of the victim and a cold rejection of the culprit, a love for post-apartheid South Africa and all that its struggle stood for, and a total loathing for discrimination, racism and degradation of human life and rights.-----
.He had a raging thirst for the recognition and validation of a human narrative to vindicate the almost unbearable suffering of the Palestinian people and to render them part of an inclusive human experience. He had the integrity and compassion to extend recognition to the horrific suffering of the Jewish people and the unspeakable pain of the holocaust and simultaneously to demand of Israel recognition of its own culpability for the plight of the Palestinian people (as cited in Ahmed,2003,p.4).

Many critics blame Said for being putatively guided by nationalism and bias towards Islamic civilization but in reality, Said transcends nationalism, eurocentrism, and ethnocentrism because Said's integrity and commitment was never bound by these ideologies. Rather he speaks with a sense of tremendous urgency of the necessity to revivify humanism as a rational, secular, historically –conscious attitude that may stand as a shield against all manipulated knowledge available on the internet, mass media and research. Reflecting in 2003 on *Orientalism*, twenty-five years after its publication, Said considers himself a humanist:

My idea in *Orientalism* is to use humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us. I have called what I try to do “humanism”, a word I continue to use stubbornly despite the scornful dismissal of the term by sophisticated post modern critics. By humanism I mean first of all attempting to dissolve Blake’s ‘mind forged manacles’ so as to be able to use one’s mind historically and rationally for the purpose of reflective understanding. Moreover, humanism is sustained by a sense of community with other interpreters and other societies and periods: strictly speaking therefore, there is no such thing as an isolated humanist (as cited in Siddiqi,2005,p. 80).

On the basis of humanism, Said advises the concerned authority of Israel/Palestine to pay full attention to the reality of both the Palestinian’s rights and Israeli sufferings and calls for equality and democracy in a new binational Israel and Palestine where there will be co-existence and not further suppression and denials, and not any violence as resistance. The postmodernists perceive a more complex relationship between the state and its scholar because the state creates scholarship in its own power interest. But Edward Said in his *Orientalism* dismisses this simplification saying that the postmodernist view put forward that scholars, having been influenced by states, publish work that not only backs up the state’s views but also produces evidences for furthering or maintaining power over others. Said considers the relationship between the scholars and the states as a “dynamic exchange” since it entails actions and reactions for the both parties. The states limit the boundaries of discussions and pursuits of knowledge for the scholars. But surprisingly enough, Said’s integrity and commitment never allows him to be a spokesman of any state’s propaganda or ideology.

Edward Said’s integrity and commitment to “secular criticism” bestows on him a spirit of ‘amateurism’-

“the desire to be moved not by profit or reward but by love for and unquenchable interest in the larger picture, in making connections across lines and barriers, in refusing to be tied down to a specialty, in caring for ideas and values despite the restrictions of a profession”, an amateur intellectual being one “who considers that to be a thinking and concerned member of a society one is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity as it involves one’s country, its power, its mode of interacting with its citizens as well as other societies”(as cited in Biswas,2007,p.124).

Said (1994) saw “secular criticism” as constitutive of the life of intellectual and bemoans in *Culture and Imperialism* the disappearance of the “general secular intellectual-figures of learning and authority whose general scope over many fields gave them more than professional competence, that is, a critical intellectual style”(p.328).These intellectual must ‘speak truth to power’. Accordingly, Said as a political atheist calls the US a ‘dishonest broker’ in the peace process due to its long standing support for Israel and mocked the rites and rituals that worshipper of such super power staged insisting that these are the proof of moral bankruptcy in intellectuals . Edward Said rejected the position of native informant unlike V.S.Naipaul who became a Western collaborator against other natives in spite of being rooted in India and transplanted to the West Indies.

Even, unlike Edward Said, Homi Bhabha as a postcolonial critic and presumably also anti-colonial never describes the Zionist enterprise or Israeli occupation as having anything to do with colonialism. Rather he depoliticized deeply political questions of Israel-Palestine conflict and he calls for a negotiated 'just and lasting peace'. Interestingly enough, these very terms are borrowed from US State Departments that also never mention colonialism or occupation. On the other side, Bernard Lewis and P.G. Huntington emerged immediately after 9-11 as the most influential scholars on US Pentagon and national Security Council concerning the Arab and Islamic world through 'Clash of Civilizations' theory and essentializing Islam as monolithic, unchanging, terrorist, anti-modern etc. As a result, everyday the relationship between the Muslim world and the West is falling apart widening the gap. According to Said, the words like 'terrorism' anti-modern, unchanging are flinging words. In fact, such large abstractions are hiding sordid material interests of the West such as control of oil, keeping mutual hostility alive for arms business in the Middle East and supporting Zionism. Said (1981) in *Covering Islam* exposes the reality focusing on how choices and interpretations of fact concerning the Islamic world are constructed within the context of a dominant western viewpoint telling us:

It is only a slight overstatement to say that Muslims and Arabs are essentially covered, discussed, apprehended, either as oil suppliers or as potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Muslim life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Islamic world (p.26).

We know Middle East has also been the major source of world energy since 1930. The area combinedly produces 37 percent of the world oil and 18 percent of its gas and more astonishingly, the region has 65 percent of global oil proven reserves and 45 percent of its natural gas. As a result, the region is vitally important to the world as far as energy security is concerned. During Arab-Spring the world's democratic flag bearers specially US took more proactive role in ousting Libyan dictator Gaddafi and Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak but we are getting an enigmatic silence from the democratic flag bearers about Saudi Arabia's tribalistic regime and Bahrain's oppressive government. This dual policy reveals the true foreign policy of the West based on Senator Fulbright's "voodoo diplomacy" and Wesley Clark's "profits of war" in the name of "democracy" and "war on terror", that is, whenever any oil-rich country is against the interest of the West, it is facing democratization effort from the Western power. So Edward Said's integrity and his firm commitment in 'amateurism' turn him to be a disturber of the status quo "speaking truth to power" and identify him with the underrepresented, disadvantaged and oppressed.

Edward Said's integrity and commitment to truth confers on him a universal and globalizing attitude instead of being trapped in Occidentalism and Area Studies. Many critics like Sadiq Jalal al-'Azam and Bernard Lewis wrongly attributed Occidentalism to Said but astoundingly Said is very intelligent and true to himself enough to

articulate a very universal and globalizing method contrary to traditional European scholarship on non-Europeans. That is why he did not objectify the European but held himself accountable to the very people and cultures he studied and wrote about. This is the exact reverse what Orientalists do when they study non-Europeans. What made Said's *Orientalism* the most used text in Postcolonial studies was its exploding notion of Orient and Occident, its addressing the subjects of its very study, Europeans, in one of their own languages and its evaluating them by their own normative evaluative criteria. This excellence takes Said away from the limitation of Area Studies which is a push away from the model of Orientalism and was designed as a primary manner of learning about culture through a number of specialists trained in the languages and cultures of the other parts of the world at the very outset of the Cold War. Unlike the Orientalists Said did not reduce the people studied as "silent Other" and did not ban those studied from having a voice in the study of themselves. He designed a common platform for the emancipation of future generation concentrating on interdependent histories of injustice and oppression as Said (2001) elucidates in "Islam and the West are inadequate banners":

'Islam' and 'the West' are simply inadequate as banners to follow blindly. Some will run behind them, but for future generations to condemn themselves to prolonged war and suffering without so much as a critical pause, without looking at interdependent histories of injustice and oppression, without trying for common emancipation and mutual enlightenment seems far more willful than necessary. Demonization of the 'Other' is not a sufficient basis for any kind of decent politics, certainly not now when the rote of terror in injustice can be addressed, and the terrorist isolated, deterred or put out of business. It takes patience and education, but is more worth the investment than still greater levels of large-scale violence and suffering (p.3).

So Edward Said easily escapes from the problematic procedures of dichotomizing and restructuring foreign or other cultures and traditions on the question of cross-cultural understanding unlike V.S.Naipaul who in his *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* took a safe tour in Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia with strong western prejudice about Islam and predictably sent a report to the West on Islam's essential flaw. Accordingly Naipaul was trapped in Area Studies because beside the lack of language skills he did not have enough time to take a great deal of first hand experience in those four visited countries. On the other hand, regarding Islam as a culture on the question of cross-cultural understanding Edward Said is much unbiased and outspoken. His interest in Goethe is indicative of his own position about Islam as a culture. Goethe's lyric cycle is animated by a spirit of open investigation towards the East/Islam based on art and culture, not on blind dogma or military or state apparatuses. This cycle is a source of an alternative epistemology concerned with the cross-pollination between East and West. Goethe's Oriental impersonation culminates in the poems of *The West Eastern Divan* (1814-1815) in which Persian and Arabic verse forms, themes, imagery, fervent praises of Oriental attitudes towards love, pleasure and ethics are found. Apart from this, Goethe knew Arabic well and read the Koran with care and acknowledged it as a profound inspiration: Islam seemed to him a liberating substitute to the Christian morality of Germany (Warner, 2000, p. 5). But it is an irony that a handful of Pentagon civilian elites

tendentiously demonize the Muslims as ‘terrorists’ but Said(2001) understood the function of the Islam in *Orientalism* that “not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma” (p.59).Said also divulges the reason for the demonization of Islam saying that its purpose is to keep people stirred up and angry through various media images and it can be exploited at times of crisis and insecurity of the kind that specially the post 9/11 period has produced. This manipulation and exploitation is only making the gap between Muslims and West unbridgeable. But in an age of globalization this narrow outlook about a diverse culture like Islam is a big obstacle in the way of making “one world”. To solve this problem Edward Said (2003) has prescribed a universal and globalizing roadmap in the *Preface to Orientalism*:

Critical thought does not submit to commands to join in the ranks marching against one or another approved enemy. Rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together in far more interesting ways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow. But for that kind of wider perception we need time, patient and skeptical enquiry, supported by faith in communities of interpretation that are difficult to sustain in a world demanding instant action and reaction(p.6).

Edward Said’s integrity and commitment to truth-seeking and truth- speaking provides him with the moral authority to diagnose the main reason of crisis and conflict between Islam and the West. Said (2002) in one of his essay “Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams cannot be Simplified” said:

in my book *Orientalism*, I argued that the original reason for European attempts to deal with Islam as if it were one giant entity was polemical-that is –Islam was considered a threat to Christian Europe and had to be fixed ideologically, the way Dante fixes Muhammad in one of the lower circles of hell(p.1).

So the first and foremost reason of Europe’s interest in Islam is not curiosity .Rather it is the fear of a powerful monotheistic competitor in the cultural and military field. This combination of fear and animosity has been lasting for nearly 14 centuries as Bernard Lewis clarifies “an ongoing struggle has taken place between the ‘rival systems’ of the Judo-Christian and Muslim ‘blocks’ for nearly 14 centuries. It has consisted of a long series of attacks and counterattacks, jihads and crusades, conquests and reconquest” (as cited in El-Haj,2005,p.1).The Oxford English Dictionary online(OED) traces uses of the term from as far back as 1205 A.C.E to distinguish Europe from Asia. Along with this division between Islam and the West the competition started but this competition has a long history. William H. McNeil in his book *The Rise of the West* traces the “history of the human community” from *Homo sapiens* and the breakthrough to Mesopotamia civilization ,then the rise of civilization in the Middle East, India, Greece and China and at last the culminating rise of civilization in Europe including US during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With the climactic rise of civilization the United States united with

Europe vied with the Soviet Union for dominance over the rest of the world during Cold War. At this stage though Islam was considered a universal threat to US, at first US wanted to thwart Russia as their immediate opponent. To do this US foreign policy was to encourage the Islamic political groups in various countries regardless of fundamentalism and terrorism as a challenge to communist and radical nationalist movements supported by the Soviets. For example, Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan and Saddam Hossein in Iraq had been promoted by US to fight against the Soviet communism and nationalism. But with the fall of the Soviet through the end of Cold War only Islam remains a threat to Christian civilization. Besides, Philip Hitti, Bernard Lewis, Huntington and at last media maneuver an idea that conflict between civilizations will be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world with the dominance of the most intense conflict between Muslims and Asian societies on the one hand and the West on the other. Unfortunately 9/11 brought this clash of civilization hypothesis to forefront. As a result US and Europe started attacking directly or indirectly the threatening Islamic countries on various excuses such as Iraq for atom bomb, Afghanistan for terrorism, Iran for fundamentalism through revolution in 1979 and at last Libya for lack of democracy. That is why it is said that in foreign policy US is used to creating Frankensteins who threaten their influence in the world. So it comes as no surprise that many Christians are the source of some of the worst lies and distortions about Islam because Islam was its main “competitor” on the stage of world religion based civilizations. Said (1980) aptly comments in “Islam Through Western Eyes”:

Insofar Islam has always been seen as belonging to the Orient, its particular fate within the general structure of Orientalism has been to be looked at with a very special hostility and fear. There are, of course, many obvious religious, psychological and political reasons for this, but all of these reasons derive from a sense that so far as the West is concerned, Islam represents not only a formidable competitor but also a late –coming challenge to Christianity. I have not been able to discover any period in European or American history since the Middle Ages in which Islam was generally discussed or thought about outside a framework created by passion, prejudice and political interest(p.5).

Innovative interpretation and critical judgment:

Edward Said’s continuous transcendence of racial and religious lines in interpretation and critical judgment discover a deep and enduring common reality in postcolonial era. Said, like Foucault, denies the concept of knowledge and scholarship for its own sake. Rather, according to his method, knowledge is always connected to political, social, economic and other power systems. It is formed through the interactions among the political power, intellectual power and cultural power. With these ideas as the foundation of his thought he explained the relationship between Islam and the West as a relationship of power and control through knowledge about Islamic countries and Muslims. There has been a significant constriction of free spirit and humanism of the intellectuals with the concentration on state power and imperialism in the academies in the West specially US

and this onslaught on academic freedom which is usually called the ‘mantra of liberal bias’ is supported by a well-funded network of conservative think tanks, policy makers, centres, institutes and concerned citizens within and outside the academies and universities. For instance, in *Orientalism* Said (2001) argues that in the United States “political imperialism governs an entire field of study, imagination and scholarly institutions” (p.14). There is evidence that after 9/11 powerful men in the US administration, all the way up to the President himself, turned to Bernard Lewis. Vice president Dick Cheney is also reported to have taken the advice from Lewis. Even Paul Wolfowitz, Under Secretary of Defense, praised Lewis, according to the Truman News on-line Speaking through a video feed at a March, 2002 international conference at the Truman Research Institute for the advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, saying:

Bernard Lewis has brilliantly placed the relationships and the issues of the Middle East into their larger context, with truly objective, original and always independent thought. Bernard has taught [us] how to understand the complex and important history of Middle East and use it to guide us to where we will go next to build a better world for generation to come (as cited in Earn, 2004.p.48).

So Said aptly articulates in the essay “East isn’t East” that “much of the information and knowledge about Islam----that was used by the colonial powers----derived from Orientalist scholarship” and that “many Islamic specialists were and still are routinely consulted by, and actively work for, governments whose designs in the Islamic world are economic exploitation, domination or outright aggression” (as cited in Teitelbaum &Litvak, 2006). It is very clear that Orientalism is integrally connected to imperialism as an expression of the nexus between knowledge and power and therefore, Orientalists want to gain knowledge of the Muslims world in order to control them. At this stage it can be said that Said based this idea on the ideas of Gramsci, Foucault and others because, according to postmodernist, the ideas of Orientalist and Area Studies experts maintain and reinforce an oppressive relationship. At first, the state for its part plays an integral role setting power relationships by establishing the boundaries for discussions and pursuits of knowledge in the scholars. This strong relationship between scholars and imperial powers demonstrate the manner in which states have the ability to mould the idea of “truth” by which the imperial power can extend its hegemony. That is why, according to Foucault, “truth is not some objective concept of what happens rather a thing of this world created by the scholars and the state that induces regular effects of power” (qtd in Earn, 2004, p. 83). Edmond Burke, like Said, criticizes in his book *Islam and the West* Orientalists who at the outset of the twentieth century dealt with minor issues such as studying obscure manuscripts, folk traits, rural Sufism, popular religion etc instead of the study of the national movements and Islamic civilizations developed in the region (as cited in Teitelbaum &Litvak,2006).

Edward Said’s theoretical commitment based on individual honesty and passion, and anti- orthodoxy makes his skill of interpretation and acute critical judgment different from other literary critics, and contributes in the field of the methodology of literary and cultural studies. Through the publication of Said’s accomplished work *Beginnings*:

Intentions and Method (1975), one could easily understand that Said would set his own path. There were the years of the rise of literary theory in America and many of his contemporaries were absorbed in Russian formalism or French structuralism or deconstructionism. But instead of following any traditional theory, Said developed his own theoretical strategy. He embedded his project neither in the semiotic structuralist methodology that led ultimately to deconstruction nor in Marxist literary theory. He was fond of Michel Foucault's position regarding Islam and his concept of knowledge. Both Foucault and Said were anti everything that smelt of the status quo. That is why Said was for every 'Other' and praised Exotic or the Different as Foucault was uncritical of either revolutionary Iran at one point or Islam as 'Other'. Said, in his later works, became so exceptional for his ideas and critical method that he emphasized the ability to blend the creative, critical and philosophical elements in a lucid and impossibly simple style rejecting orthodoxy and defending the virtue-not compromising in the name of expediency. With his two subsequent books, *The Question of Palestine* (1979) and *Covering Islam* (1981) he provided case studies illustrating his theory. For example, in his book *Covering Islam*, he (1981) wants a new knowledge named 'antithetical knowledge' from journalists, commentators and intellectuals and defines it in this way: "By antithetical knowledge I mean the kind of knowledge produced by people who quite consciously consider themselves to be writing in opposition to the prevailing orthodoxy" (p.157). He then says that the 'antithetical' school is made up of 'younger scholars' who "tend to be more sophisticated and more honest politically, than their elders in the field; they see work on Islam as in some way connected to the political activities of the state and therefore make no pretence of being "objective" scholars" (p.158). So both theoretically and methodologically he (1993) kept himself aloof from poststructuralist, more specifically, deconstructionist approaches to literary texts as he admitted clearly his methodological commitment in *Culture and Imperialism*:

Cults like post-modernism, discourse analysis, New Historicism, deconstruction, neo-pragmatism transport them (intellectual) into the country of the blue; an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history and individual responsibility fritters away attention to public matters and to public discourse (p.302).

The breadth of this Said's groundbreaking methodology and theory and its originality made it an international success. It soon became a combination of several processes, including a great enthusiasm for the Third World in the American academy, increased criticism of America's policy, and generational changes in the research community of Western and especially US institutions. It not only called upon the orient to represent itself and to speak out but it argued for the critic's autonomy from the dogma of theory. So Said's methodological and theoretical success made his interpretation very logical and reasonable in dealing with the relationship between Islam and the West.

Said's skill in interpretation and critical study of literary texts encourages the readers and critics to reexamine Western representations of Islam and Muslim world in the works of

European canonical writers in the light of “contrapuntal approach” and creates a political awareness among the scholars about the influence of discourse and cultural biases in literary texts. Said’s first book *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* was published in 1966 without any political subtext but the Arab-Israeli war the following year opened his political insight and he began combining political context with literary criticism and research. Then his subsequent books articulated that all texts should be interpreted in the context of the social world, human life and the historical moments in which they were located. While in *Orientalism* Said argues for the significance of colonial discourse and draws its outline, in *Culture and Imperialism* he also proffers rich and extended readings of writers such as Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, Camus and Gide, showing how significant the experience of empire was for writers of the European literary canon. To examine this significance Said (1993) formulates in *Culture and Imperialism* an approach that he calls “contrapuntal readings”:

As we look at the cultural archive, we begin to read it not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts.[]In the same way, I believe, we can read and interpret English novels, for example, whose engagement(usually suppressed for the most part)with the West Indies or India, say, is shaped and perhaps even determined by the specific history of colonization, resistance and finally native nationalism (p.51).

Emphasizing the material contexts of the text, he calls upon the intellectual to engage with the contemporary political realities. In this context, Said’s notion of “contrapuntal reading” is similar to Bakhtin’s view of dialogic interpretation because both believe that it is the task of the critic to foreground the interaction of different voices. But the “contrapuntal reading” is more unique and expansive than New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. New Historicism deals with all of the textual traces of the past paying attention only on literary texts and emphasizing less on its political implications. And Cultural Materialism focuses mainly on the birth and life of the texts in culture and history with political legacy, not on the texts. On the other hand, the “contrapuntal reading” makes the reader conscious not only about the text about the metropolitan history but also the contexts with an array of opposition, resistance, and nationalism from the colonized. In this sense, this style of reading keeps the reader free from the reducing of texts into simple scripts.

Now with the help of “contrapuntal reading” the critic can reveal the full complexity of imperial culture by exploring the interplay of metropolitan experience and the experience of the Muslim world that can be discerned in the interstices of texts of the Postcolonial era. The reader can examine the origin and development of a body of knowledge pertaining to the Arabo-Islamic world produced by Western scholars. The text reveals that this body of knowledge, much of it accumulated after Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798, is voluminous but contradictory. This body of knowledge incorporates scientific observation as well as imaginative speculation to produce erroneous stereotypes of Islam, Muslim world. For example, we may take a pertinent example from the Postcolonial literary history in V.S.Naipaul’s travelogue *Among the Believers* in its first chapter “Iran:

The Twin Revolutions” regarding Iranian Revolution of 1979. Here Naipaul wants to portray the Iranian Revolution through the statements of Behzad, a young leftist from a provincial town and a science student in Tehran that this revolution was one form of Islamic tyranny or imperialism in Iran. Through this revolution the pro-Islamic leader Ayatollah Khomeini defeated the pro-western King Reza Shah Pahlavi. As a result many western countries lost control over vast sources of oil. So whenever we employ a “contrapuntal reading” to the book *Among the Believers*, we can know simultaneously the history of imperializing Iran by the West through Reza Pahlavi and the history of resistance to imperialism from the Islam-loving people in Iran. This incident created an anti-Islamic hysteria in the west. In this way, the centuries-old, academically produced image of the Islamic world and Islam has operated to encourage Western colonialism, economic inequalities, and hostile political condition as Said (2001) aptly said in *Orientalism*:

---estrangement from Islam simply intensified their feelings of superiority about the European culture, even as their antipathy spread to include the entire orient, of which Islam was considered a degraded (and usually, a virulently dangerous) representative. Such tendencies—it has also been my argument—became built into the very traditions of Orientalist study through the nineteenth century and in time became standard component of most Orientalist training, handed from generation to generation (p.260).

Using the “contrapuntal approach” the critics and readers became conscious about the complicity between politics regarding Muslim countries and literary texts and it became the cornerstone of a larger project of studying colonial discourses and practices “against the grain”. With this in mind, it is thus pertinent for future scholars to reexamine the texts with this “contrapuntal reading” in order to understand more comprehensively Western representations of Islam and Islamic world through literary texts. Now any open minded person embarking on a study of Islam, especially if using books written in European languages by the Western scholars, should be aware of the seemingly inherent distortions of Islam because of the West’s material interests.

Conclusion:

The battles among the scholars, critics and politicians on positive and negative sides of the contributions of Edward Said regarding West’s understanding of Islam and Muslim world make me inquisitive as well as serious about Said’s works. Some argue that Said’s criticism about Arab and Islam contributed to the exaggerated politicization of Middle Eastern studies and transformed it into a hegemonic discourse silencing all self-criticism which is the essence of all academic research. But according to me, Said’s writings can neither be reduced to a simple anti-American polemic, nor considered a blind support to “real” Islam as a religion and Muslim world, nor dismissed as the work of an angry Palestinian postcolonial writing back nor thought only a legacy for anti-imperialism. From postcolonial point of view, Said’s career and

achievement has permeated a number of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences including comparative literature, English, cultural studies, history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, music, philosophy, the study of religion and communication studies. In these disciplines he didn't defend "real" Islam as a religion rather he tried to show that "a large ideologically freighted generalization" about a rich and diverse culture, Islam, is being done due to orientalist attitude in Western media, scholars, politicians and general people. It is true that varied kinds of Islamic society have emerged throughout the world out of a total of 1.3 billion Muslims; there is not a single Islam rather there are Islams full of diversity just like other big traditions, religions and nations. But there is a common tendency in the West to equate koranic Islam with the immediate situation of one or another Islamic country. In this situation, I acknowledge, to defend Islam by Said as a culture from the monstrous representation of the Western scholars is a human endeavor and thus fraught with some flaw and open to reassessment but it is true that despite some drawbacks Said's international and eclectic approach based on intellectual integrity and unfailing moral commitment in the context of knowledge-power relationship, clash of civilizations, and the still-unfolding realities of a postcolonial world offers him a methodological, epistemological and historical insights. These insights in him brought about a revolution in his skill of humanistic interpretation and secular criticism. These integrity, insights and secular criticism of Edward Said not only provide the evidences of the monstrous representation of Islam by the Western World through the constructed views of Western media, scholars, politicians and the general people but also arrive at an enduring position to render a true understanding of Islam as a culture to the West. He brought about a breeze of fresh air with his secular criticism, penetrating insight and integrity; as result his interpretation and arguments have become even timelier than they were during their pronouncement. His writings conveyed critical examination of human values for peaceful and harmonious living among various cultures and civilizations brushing aside all misconception, blindness, and prejudice about each other. But it is unfortunate that Edward Said could not win all the literary accolades as he deserves from the West. In spite of that he did not sell his soul like V.S.Naipaul and Salman Rushdie to please the Western masters because his incorruptible integrity, erudite insights, and humanistic arguments were not for sale.

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